

WRITING TIPS

TIPS FOR WRITING A GOOD RESEARCH ARTICLE FORMAT FOR THE PAPER

Scientific research articles provide a method for scientists to communicate with other scientists about the results of their research. A standard format is used for these articles, in which the author presents the research in an orderly, logical manner. This doesn't necessarily reflect the order in which you did or thought about the work. This format is:

TITLE

1. Make your title specific enough to describe the contents of the paper, but not so technical that only specialists will understand. The title should be appropriate for the intended audience.
2. The title usually describes the subject matter of the article: Effect of Smoking on Academic Performance"
3. Sometimes a title that summarizes the results is more effective: Students Who Smoke Get Lower Grades"

AUTHORS

1. The person who did the work and wrote the paper is generally listed as the first author of a research paper.
2. For published articles, other people who made substantial contributions to the work are also listed as authors. Ask your mentor's permission before including his/her name as co-author.

ABSTRACT

1. An abstract, or summary, is published together with a research article, giving the reader a "preview" of what's to come. Such abstracts may also be published separately in bibliographical sources, such as Biological Abstracts. They allow other scientists to quickly scan the large scientific literature, and decide which articles they want to read in depth. The abstract should be a little less technical than the article itself; you don't want to dissuade your potential audience from reading your paper.
2. Your abstract should be one paragraph, of 100-250 words, which summarizes the purpose, methods, results and conclusions of the paper.
3. It is not easy to include all this information in just a few words. Start by writing a summary that includes whatever you think is important, and then gradually prune it down to size by removing unnecessary words, while still retaining the necessary concepts.
4. Don't use abbreviations or citations in the abstract. It should be able to stand alone without any footnotes.

INTRODUCTION

What question did you ask in your experiment? Why is it interesting? The introduction summarizes the relevant literature so that the reader will understand why you were interested in the question you asked. One to four paragraphs should be enough. End with a sentence explaining the specific question you asked in this experiment.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

1. How did you answer this question? There should be enough information here to allow another scientist to repeat your experiment. Look at other papers that have been published in your field to get some idea of what is included in this section.

2. If you had a complicated protocol, it may be helpful to include a diagram, table or flowchart to explain the methods you used.
3. Do not put results in this section. You may, however, include preliminary results that were used to design the main experiment that you are reporting on.
4. Mention relevant ethical considerations. If you used human subjects, did they consent to participate? If you used animals, what measures did you take to minimize pain?

RESULTS

1. This is where you present the results you've gotten. Use graphs and tables if appropriate, but also summarize your main findings in the text. Do NOT discuss the results or speculate as to why something happened; that goes in the Discussion.
2. Use appropriate methods of showing data. Don't try to manipulate the data to make it look like you did more than you actually did.

TABLES AND GRAPHS

1. If you present your data in a table or graph, include a title describing what's in the table ("Enzyme activity at various temperatures", not "My results".) For graphs, you should also label the x and y axes.
2. Don't use a table or graph just to be "fancy". If you can summarize the information in one sentence, then a table or graph is not necessary.

DISCUSSION

1. Highlight the most significant results, but don't just repeat what you've written in the Results section. How do these results relate to the original question? Do the data support your hypothesis? Are your results consistent with what other investigators have reported? If your results were unexpected, try to explain why. Is there another way to interpret your results? What further research would be necessary to answer the questions raised by your results? How do your results fit into the big picture?
2. End with a one-sentence summary of your conclusion, emphasizing why it is relevant.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This section is optional. You can thank those who either helped with the experiments, or made other important contributions, such as discussing the protocol or commenting on the manuscript.

REFERENCES (LITERATURE CITED)

There are several possible ways to organize this section. Here is one commonly used way:

1. In the text, cite the literature in the appropriate places: Scarlet (1990) thought that the gene was present only in yeast, but it has since been identified in the platypus (Indigo and Mauve, 1994) and wombat (Magenta, et al., 1995).
2. In the References section list citations in alphabetical order.
Indigo, A. C., and Mauve, B. E. 1994. Queer place for qwerty: gene isolation from the platypus. *Science* 275, 1213-1214.
Magenta, S. T., Sepia, X., and Turquoise, U. 1995. Wombat genetics. In: *Widiculous Wombats*, Violet, Q., ed. New York: Columbia University Press. p 123-145.
Scarlet, S.L. 1990. Isolation of qwerty gene from *S. cerevisiae*. *Journal of Unusual Results* 36, 26-31